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NEWS

Winchester tackles rising education costs, readies Muraco School SOI submission

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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Winchester officials are looking at submitting a Statement of Interest to the Massachusetts School Building Authority for Muraco Elementary School renovations by April 11. COURTESY PHOTO/VINCENT DIXON

The Winchester Select Board voted unanimously Monday to rele
$364,746 from the Special Education Reserve Fund to cover unexp

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cost increases in transportation and out-of-district tuition expenses.

“The contract, I believe, previously was an eight-year contract that expired, went out to bid,” said Director of Finance & Operations Andrew M. Marron. “That increase is baked into that contract, so there will be incremental increases over the coming years.”

Superintendent Dr. Frank Hackett noted the timing posed challenges for the district, as the transportation contract was finalized “after Town Meeting that approved our budget.”

The special education funds will cover both transportation and out-of-district tuition expenses through June 30, with approximately $80,000 remaining in the reserve account following the transfer. The fund allows the town to set aside funds for unexpected special education costs.

Marron reported he successfully negotiated a 35% increase in special education transportation costs down to an 8% increase for the Lynch bus tier.

The board also discussed plans to submit a Statement of Interest (SOI) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for Muraco Elementary School renovations by April 11. This submission represents the first step in applying for state funds to renovate or rebuild the aging facility.

“The SOI isn’t like a [normal] process of submitting. We have to do an educational plan” Hackett explained. “It’s really a statement of current conditions, for the most part.”

While Muraco isn’t considered overcrowded — which typically receives higher priority from MSBA — Hackett cited inadequate educatio

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as a key concern. The school currently uses a combined cafeteria, gym, and auditorium space, limiting scheduling flexibility.

The submission requires approval from both the School Committee and Select Board. Officials agreed to vote on the matter at the April 7 Select Board meeting, allowing sufficient time before the deadline.

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Hackett wants to ensure the town is taking all necessary steps on time to be ready for the submission process.

“We are committed to starting that process in full next year,” he told the board.

If the SOI is accepted, the town would enter into a 270-day eligibility phase to complete required tasks, potentially followed by a feasibility study.

Winchester has recent experience with the MSBA process. The town submitted applications for Lynch Elementary School three times before receiving approval in December 2019. The newly rebuilt Lynch Elementary is scheduled to open this fall as a net-zero energy building with a total project cost of approximately $74 million.

Former School Committee member Chris Nixon noted that if the SOI for Muraco were accepted in the first round, the town could expect an override vote as early as 2029. Even with Muraco being a smaller project than Lynch, Nixon estimated the town would likely need to borrow a similar amount due to rising construction costs.

Flood mitigation project

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In related business, the board received an update on the long-delayed Muraco Culvert Flood Mitigation Project, which requires an additional $2.6 million at Spring Town Meeting due to increased costs.

The project, originally estimated at $9.11 million, has faced significant delays and cost increases, bringing the total estimated cost to $12.8 million.

Initially approved by voters through a debt exclusion override in March 2021, the project faced considerable inflationary pressures due to post-pandemic supply chain disruptions, causing costs to rise significantly.

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) raised additional concerns about the stability of the existing culverts and required modifications, including permanent sleeves to secure the culverts during construction.

Luke Boucher, from engineering firm VHB, explained the project involves installing two 8-foot diameter culverts under MBTA railroad tracks near Muraco Elementary School. The improvement would completely remove 43 buildings from the floodplain while significantly reducing flood risks for 29 others.

“This fully brings the Muraco School out of the floodplain,” Boucher said, adding it would free up field space behind the school for potential future expansion.

Town Manager Beth Rudolph emphasized the project’s importance for the entire community.

“Once this project is complete, we’ll be able to actually go back to FEMA and have the floodplain in Winchester remapped,” Rudolph said.

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not just impact those 72 structures upstream of the Muraco culvert. It will help all of the structures throughout Winchester."

In other town sustainability efforts, Winchester officials discussed plans to apply for a $125,000 Green Communities grant to finalize electronic HVAC control installations at McCall School.

This initiative marks the concluding phase of a significant effort to transition from failed pneumatic controls, representing the town's ongoing commitment to energy efficiency and sustainability.

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district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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